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JUN 19 1964

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Harkins Optimistic On War in Vietnam

By PETER GROSE

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam,

June 18—Two of the most experienced United States officers in South Vietnam have gone on record with sharply contrasting evaluations of the outlook for the war against the Communist guerrillas.

Both are leaving South Vietnam in a few days after having served in key positions since the start of the American military buildup two and a half years ago.

Gen. Paul D. Harkins, retiring United States commander, maintained today the confident and optimistic tone he has employed throughout his service here in the face of military reserves and press criticism.

He took issue on several points with one of his senior advisors who made public yesterday some of the charges that up to now have been reported by newsmen without pinpointing their sources.

This officer, who was quoted in dispatches yesterday, spoke out against a "lack of dedicated leadership" in the South Vietnamese armed forces, the predominant role of "political maneuvering" in promotions to positions of high responsibility and the lack of any "hard sell" on the part of Americans to force necessary but unpopular decisions.

Asked whether he thought South Vietnamese officers had responded to American advice, General Harkins said: "If they hadn't, they wouldn't be where they are today, and I think they're doing very well."

On instructions of the Military Public Information Office, the officer who spoke critically yesterday could not be identified by name. He has served here nearly three years as advisor to South Vietnamese field units.

"The three vices of the Vietnamese military are politics, corruption and nepotism," he said. "Our No. 1 problem here has been getting decisions made at the top levels—even the generals in this army rose as a result of political intrigues."

General Harkins declined to reply to the officer's charges of political influence in the South Vietnamese Army. He said the coup d'etat of last Nov. 1, in which the Ngo Dinh Diem regime was overthrown, and the coup of Jan. 30, when Maj. Gen. Nguyen Khanh seized power, had thrown war effort



Associated Press

OPTIMISTIC ON WAR:
Gen. Paul D. Harkins, the retiring U.S. commander in South Vietnam. He said the war there was going well.

about nine months behind schedule.

"But, all in all, we're ready to go again," General Harkins said. "With determination we'll get this show on the road."

The other officer said he considered the war situation "far more serious" than when he arrived here nearly three years ago.

"The Vietcong are better armed, more competent and more ornery," he said.

General Harkins agreed that the capability of the Vietcong, as the Communist guerrillas are called, had improved during the

ever, he said, the South Vietnamese Government "is in a better position" to counter the guerrillas.

Command Role Opposed

The general said at a news conference that he was opposed to the United States' assuming an actual command role in Vietnam, where its function has been one of advice and support.

"We've just got to keep on doing what we have been doing," General Harkins said.

The other officer declared that some steps should be taken to bring about "proper management of this war, set up priorities and get good people out into the provinces—the colonels and lieutenant colonels won't get their hands dirty in this war."

General Harkins said he was sure Premier Khanh was trying to get "the people he thinks are the best" into positions of command. He said he flatly disagreed with criticism that the war was not being properly managed.

General Harkins attributed the slowdown in the war effort in part to command changes and dislocations stemming from the two coups. The other officer said he felt most of the command changes had been improvements. "But there are still too many second-raters around," he declared.

Johnson Stresses Importance

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 18 — President Johnson, disturbed by reports that some Government officials have been reluctant to serve in South Vietnam, has offered personally to persuade them of the importance of the job there.

In a memorandum June 9 to the heads of five key agencies, the President said that it had come to his attention that

individuals had declined to work in South Vietnam.

"The country has no more important job now than to get the best men in every field for more effective service to our embattled friends in South Vietnam," the President's memorandum said.

"If in any case direct word from me could be helpful, I expect to be called on," he said. "I would want no United States officer to be in doubt of the value of service in Vietnam and of the importance which I personally attach to it."

The memorandum was addressed to Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, John A. McCone, Director of the Central Intelligence, David E. Bell, the foreign aid administrator, and Carl Rowan, director of the United States Information Agency.

Although the President did not indicate which of these had encountered recruiting problems, qualified sources said it was primarily the foreign aid agencies.

These sources said there had been a number of cases where technical specialists, such as forestry experts or agricultural technicians—some of them employed by domestic agencies of the Government—had declined to take jobs in Vietnam.

The principal reasons cited were problems with children in school, hazards to families or unwillingness of families to travel and live in the tropics, especially under conditions of battle and terrorism.